

VZCZCXRO4063
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0264/01 0291524
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 291524Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5474
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000264

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2018
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BATTLE FOR BAGHDAD PART 1: MAKING PROGRESS

REF: A. 07 BAGHDAD 4098 - NORTHWEST BAGHDAD RECONCILIATION
[1](#)B. 07 BAGHDAD 3840 - SUNNI SUBURBS SEE SERVICES
SUPPORT
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 22 - SIGNS OF NORMALCY IN BAGHDAD
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 25 - SUNNI CHICKS IN BAGHDAD MARKETS
[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 20 - DOURA MARKET REVIVES

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: As violence drops, community life rebounds, and markets revive, substantial improvements in the security environment in Baghdad have precipitated a shift in attitude among many Baghdad residents. Locals seem buoyed by the fragile hope that the near future may be better than the recent past. The speed and durability of progress toward a stable capital of Iraq depends in part on this popular perception of forward momentum, created largely by a decrease in violence. Cables two and three in this three-part series on the battle for Baghdad will examine why recent progress, while significant and encouraging, still appears tenuous and reversible. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) This political section cable draws on information, analysis and anecdotes from post's local contacts, the Baghdad PRT, the Baghdad EPRTs, as well as MNF-I spot reports, surveys and polling.

WHAT IS THE BATTLE FOR BAGHDAD ALL ABOUT?

[1](#)3. (C) Violence levels have become the measure and the hallmark of progress in the battle for Baghdad. A variety of armed entities -- insurgents, terrorists, militias, foreign fighters, criminals -- still believe that they can achieve their aims by attacking civilians, security forces, government officials, infrastructure, services, professionals, and markets. With so many different actors conducting attacks for various reasons, many Baghdad residents now appear to care less about the relative standing of one group vis-a-vis another and more about the level of violence itself.

[1](#)4. (C) For the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Coalition, the battle for Baghdad has thus become an unremitting fight against the violent means employed by various individuals and groups seeking power in Iraq's capital city. It is a battle against violence. In order to win the battle, the GoI, with the support of the Coalition, must degrade the capacity of various violent groups to carry out attacks while simultaneously enhancing the allure of non-violent paths to power -- paths that run through Baghdad's new political institutions and its traditional social and economic structures. There are signs of progress on all of these fronts as 2008 begins to unfold.

VIOLENCE IN BAGHDAD DROPS SIGNIFICANTLY

15. (U) Violent attacks in Baghdad have decreased dramatically since June 2007. According to MNF-I statistics, the province has experienced an 81 percent decline in total attacks on Coalition Forces (CF), Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), infrastructure, and civilians -- including attacks by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines, snipers, ambushes, grenades, other small arms fire, mortars, and rockets. During the same period, MNF-I cites a 74 percent decline in the number of civilians killed, and a 60 percent decline in civilians wounded -- as part of an overall decrease of 62 percent in attacks on civilians. MNF-I also reports a 78 percent drop in what MNF-I deems "ethno-sectarian" civilian deaths since June 2007, as well as a 56 percent decline in high-profile attacks.

INCHING TOWARD POLITICAL UNITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

16. (SBU) Some of this security progress has filtered into old and new institutions at the local level. Cross-sectarian reconciliation meetings have taken place in some of Baghdad's strife-torn districts and qadas, including Rashid, 9 Nissan, Mansour, Mahmoudiya, Taji, and Abu Ghraib. In some areas, regular reconciliation events have assumed a quasi-institutional status as a peaceful mechanism for cross-sectarian dialogue and political jockeying (reftel A). Many tribal leaders -- Sunni and Shia -- have mobilized participation in these engagements, and encouraged membership in "Concerned Local Citizen" groups that bolster neighborhood protection. Leaders from Taji, Mada'in and Mahmoudiya qadas

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met with Directors General from service Ministries in the first meetings of the Rural Joint Planning Commission, held between November and January; these meetings represent a notable stride forward in efforts by the Coalition and Baghdad PRT to connect the Shia-dominated central government to the predominantly Sunni outlying areas of Baghdad province (reftel B). PRToffs have also noted smaller signs of unity in Baghdad's neighborhoods. Locals report, for instance, an increase in the number of inter-marriages -- in mid-December, 70 inter-sectarian couples participated in a mass public wedding in Baghdad.

PARTYING LIKE IT'S 2008 -- SOCIAL LIFE REVIVES

17. (SBU) Baghdad residents have resumed what they describe as "normal" public outings and social engagements much more frequently than they did as recently as September 2007 (reftel C). Interviews, surveys and polls reveal that Baghdad residents now feel far safer in their neighborhoods and homes than they did before the troop surge in Baghdad. "Exactly this time last year, I received a death threat," a resident of the area along Haifa Street told poloff. Compared to a year ago, he said, "Haifa Street is like heaven." Families have also demonstrated their confidence in Baghdad's security by venturing out in increasingly large numbers to visit public places, such as parks and the city zoo. Crowds bustle in traditional urban centers, including Abu Nuwas Street in Rusafa and the upscale markets of Karada. Local residents reported that Eid celebrations felt freer and safer than did the same celebrations last year. Some recent public events have even continued after dark, an extremely uncommon practice which did not occur even after the national soccer team won the Asia Cup on July 29, 2007. Many Baghdadis celebrated New Year's Eve, for instance, at midnight -- in public. Delighted to be driving at night, one contact called poloff from his car to report that he was seeing his dashboard lights "for the first time in two years."

MORE TO BUY, MORE TO SPEND -- BAGHDAD MARKETS REVIVE

18. (SBU) Night driving is one among several factors contributing to a gradual increase in economic activity in Baghdad, according to post, PRT, and EPRT interlocutors. Since they feel safer traveling after dark, local workers claim that productivity has increased because workload, instead of daylight hours, dictates the amount of time they spend at the office. They can also travel to restaurants and shops that have recently managed to remain open in the evening. This increasing freedom of movement has enabled producers to transport more goods and services to their consumers. There are signs that Baghdad's rural agricultural centers have benefited from this improvement by sending more produce to large urban markets (reftel D). As goods and customers arrive in increasing numbers, both traditional and contemporary shopping centers have palpably revived throughout Baghdad province (reftel E). Militias reportedly have a reduced presence in and around these markets, and the number of mass casualty attacks on shopping areas has significantly decreased. Shoppers appear to have more disposable income than previously, in large part because, according to residents, a gradual increase in "hours of power" from the national electrical grid has reduced the cost of operating their residential generators -- a major expense.

BUT THE VIOLENCE CONTINUES...

19. (SBU) Despite this substantial and encouraging progress, high levels of violence still plague the residents of Baghdad. Insurgents, Al Qaeda in Iraq, and Shia militias are still carrying out attacks against the GoI, the Iraqi people, and Coalition Forces. Septels examine the potential for a slowing or reversal of recent improvements in the security environment.
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